

In the Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A milking ~~machine~~ unit cylinder comprising:

a flexible element; ~~and~~

at least one sensor element which detects a substantial weight on the flexible

element to trigger a start signal for a milking process; and

a rapid ventilation valve-in-communication with the sensor element.
2. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein the sensor element emits a start signal as the weight on the flexible element exceeds a predetermined threshold value.
3. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 2, wherein the predetermined threshold value is variable.
4. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein the predetermined threshold value is independent of an operating vacuum.
5. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, ~~wherein at least one~~
and further comprising:

a biasing element is ~~provided~~ disposed to move the rapid ventilation valve into

a closed position.
6. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim ~~[[4]]~~ 5, wherein the predetermined threshold value is influenced by the biasing element.
7. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein the flexible element is coupled to a movable element.
8. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein the flexible element is configured as a chain.

9. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein the flexible element is coupled to ~~the~~ a milking unit.
10. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein at least one sensor element is selected from a group of sensors consisting of: load measuring means, proximity switches, magnetic limiting switches, dry reed contact switches, expansion measuring strips, magnetic, inductive, capacitive sensors and resistance sensors and combinations thereof.
11. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the sensor element is mounted within the cylinder.
12. (Previously Presented) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 1, wherein the sensor element is contactless.
13. (Currently Amended) A milking unit cylinder, ~~comprising:~~ according to claim 1, wherein the a rapid ventilation membrane valve comprises a closing element which is movable between an open position and a closed position.
14. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim ~~13~~ 1, wherein the rapid ventilation ~~membrane valve~~ defines a control port ~~and the milking unit cylinder further comprises: an air controller.~~
15. (Canceled)
16. (Canceled)

17. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim ~~13~~ 14, wherein the rapid ventilation valve comprises:
- a membrane for moving between a control port open position and a control port closing position; and ~~and further comprising~~
- a biasing means that biases the ~~rapid-ventilation~~ membrane toward the control port closed position.
18. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim ~~13~~ 17, wherein the ~~rapid-ventilation~~ membrane in the control port open position permits air to flow from ~~defines a rapid ventilation aperture for communicating air and moving the rapid-ventilation membrane to a ventilation position~~ into the milking unit cylinder.
19. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim ~~13~~ 17, wherein the ~~rapid-ventilation~~ membrane is disposed in the milking unit cylinder to define an interior space; and the milking unit cylinder further comprises a piston mounted in the interior space.
20. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 19, and further comprising a membrane control port mounted on the side of the ~~rapid-ventilation~~ membrane that is opposite the piston.
21. (Currently Amended) The milking unit cylinder according to claim 20, wherein the ~~rapid ventilation~~ membrane can be placed in a ventilation position by applying atmospheric pressure in the interior space and by applying subpressure to the membrane control port.
22. (Canceled)
23. (Canceled)

24. (Currently Amended) A method for automatically starting a milking process comprising the steps of:

holding a milking unit at a first position;

triggering a start signal; and

rapidly ventilating a milking unit cylinder.

25. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 24 and further comprising the step of lifting a the milking unit to a second position to trigger a start signal.

26. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 24 wherein the step of:

rapidly ventilating the milking unit cylinder comprises the step of:

ventilating gas through a plurality of ventilation apertures.

27. (Canceled)

28. (Canceled)